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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL QUILTER VISIT TO MICHOACAN: PROGRESS IN
STATE, BUT MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE

REF: MEXICO 06024

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR CHARLES V.BARCLAY. REASON:
1.4 (B), (D).

[11](#). (SBU) Summary: On November 28 and 29, the House Foreign Affairs staff delegation headed by Peter Quilter spent a day and a half in Morelia, Michoacan to discuss the impact of the GOM's counter-narcotics operations in the state and the Merida Initiative with state officials and NGO representatives. Both public and private contacts recognized the overall positive impact Mexican military operations against narco-cartels were having on the state's crime scene, but cautioned that much remains to be done to curb violence and criminality. With a few caveats, most interlocutors welcomed the enhanced bilateral law enforcement cooperation envisioned in the recently announced Merida Initiative. End Summary.

[12](#). (SBU) After two days of meetings in Mexico City (discussed in septel), Peter Quilter, House Foreign Affairs Committee, Professional Staff Member, accompanied by staff members Melissa Silverman and John Mackey, traveled to the Michoacan state capital on November 28 to discuss the security situation and government response in one of Mexico's most crime-ridden states. The group met with human rights NGOs, the outgoing state governor, Lazaro Cardenas, as well as with senior state law enforcement officials.

Rights Groups Recognize Military's Role in Reducing Violence, But Criticize "Piecemeal" GOM Approach

[13](#). (SBU) Staffdel Quilter's first meeting was with four state human rights organizations. Representatives at the meeting recognized that the military's expanded presence in the state since December 2006 had reduced drug-related violence, but complained that the GOM's military offensives lacked a definitive strategy and was poorly coordinated with state and local authorities. Moreover, in their judgment, the GOM's counter-narcotics operations have resulted in a "cockroach effect," moving the cartels into other non-targeted areas. NGO contacts lamented that drug consumption in the state was rising and very few resources are spent on prevention and addiction programs.

[14](#). (SBU) Staffdel later met with Victor Manuel Serrato Lozana, President of the State Human Rights Commission who described the process by which both the State and National Human Rights Commissions receive, investigate, and process

complaints. Serrato described the two violation cases brought against military soldiers in May and said it took approximately four months for the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) to investigate the complaints and issue a recommendation. In turn, it took the Defense Secretariat (SEDENA) approximately one month to accept CNDH's recommendations.

Outgoing Governor Supports GOM Strategy, Merida Initiative

15. (SBU) On November 29, the delegation met with outgoing Michoacan PRD Governor Lazaro Cardenas Batel who expressed his firm support for the GOM's military operations. Gov. Cardenas said the security situation in Michoacan had improved significantly due to the presence of military troops. He also suggested the military operations prompted a territorial truce between the two major drug cartels. Finally, he noted that collaboration between the military and state government elements was good.

6.(C) Delegation-head Peter Quilter expressed his concern that PRD Governor-elect Leonel Godoy would not be as supportive of the GOM's military operations as Cardenas, administration. Cardenas shared this concern, noting that many members of his political party did not support the role of the military in combating the cartels. However, he suggested that Godoy might develop a new perspective on military involvement once he inherits the problems of the state.

7.(C) With respect to the Merida Initiative, Cardenas expressed his support, but advised the delegation not to compare it to Plan Colombia, given Mexican sensitivities to

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what may be perceived as U.S. intervention. Cardenas also expressed concern that the initiative was packaged together with funding for Iraq and Afghanistan and suggested that the USG and/or GOM be ready to explain the budget process should it become an issue.

State Law Enforcement Officials Praise Military's Role

18. (SBU) The delegation also had separate meetings with State Attorney General Juan Antonio Magana and State Secretary of Public Security Jorge Reza Maqueo. Both Magana and Reza told the delegation that the military was the only government entity equipped to combat the sophisticated weaponry of the cartels. Reza said the mountainous terrain in Michoacan made it difficult for police to reach areas where the cartels are active. Responding to a question from the delegation on the sharing of air assets, Reza said the army would provide helicopter lifts to SSP elements if they requested it.

19. (SBU) Magana and Reza both commented on the issue of arms trafficking. Magana said the majority of arms in Michoacan are coming from the U.S. Reza, on the other hand, said their biggest concern is with assault rifles (AK-47s), the majority of which come through the port of Lazaro Cardenas.

110. (SBU) Magana said the military plays the leading role in the joint operation -- which includes police fresh out of the academy -- and is necessarily discreet and closed about its activities. He suggested continued military presence for at least another three years to allow enough time to reform and equip federal, state, and local police to deal with the problem of organized crime and drug-trafficking.

111. Comment: The delegation welcomed their experience in Michoacan and the opportunity to meet with state government/law enforcement officials and local civil society representatives. The delegation expressed optimism about the Merida Initiative's prospects -- "with a few tweaks" -- to Michoacan interlocutors. They were also pleased with the human rights violation investigation time-period and process described by Serrato. End Comment.

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